

PHILOSOPHY 491:
PHILOSOPHY OF MIND AND COGNITIVE SCIENCE
Monday and Wednesday 2:40 - 3:55; Walsh 499
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One of the reasons cognitive science is such a land of plenty for philosophers is that so many of its questions—not just the grand bird’s-eye view questions but quite proximal, in-the-lab-now questions—are still ill thought out, prematurely precipitated into forms that deserve critical reevaluation. If philosophy is, as my bumper sticker slogan has it, what you’re doing until you figure out just what questions to ask, then there is a lot of philosophy to be done by cognitive scientists these days (Dennett, TopiCS, 2009)

Our goal in this course is to examine some of the core issues in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science that deserve the sort of critical evaluation that is suggested by Daniel Dennett in this passage. The readings for this course will be divided into three parts. In **Part I**, our primary concern will be to establish a working knowledge of the most important ‘birds-eye’ approaches to questions about the nature of the mind; we will focus on the considerations that led to the flight from behaviorism, and to the broad consensus that functionalism is the most plausible theory about what minds are. In **Part II**, we will turn our attention to a narrower set of theoretical issues surrounding the claim that the mind is best understood in computational terms; we will ask what this claim means, and we will ask whether we should believe some version of the computational theory of mind. Finally, in **Part III**, we will choose some currently hot topic in the cognitive sciences, examining the theoretical issues that arise in some recent papers. The topic of Part III will be decided by consensus among the members of this class; you are welcome to suggest any topic that happens to be of interest, but I would suggest the following possible topics: the empirical study of moral judgment, the plausibility of ‘embodied’ models of human cognition, the existence of ‘mirror-neurons’, or the scientific study of consciousness.

Course Requirements (undergraduate): In this class you will be expected to make consistent contributions to the discussion in class (**30% of your grade**). Philosophy is a skill that develops by *working together* to understand hard philosophical issues. In addition, you will also be required to submit two short papers (max: 3000 words; abstract max: 150 words). The first paper will address a topic that is covered in Part I or II (due: 11/5; **30% of your grade**). The second paper will address a methodological or conceptual issue that arises in Part III of the course (due: 12/17; **40% of your grade**). You may also petition to write a single, longer paper (max: 7500 words; abstract max: 300 words) on a topic of your choosing; this will require the submission of a paper proposal (due: 11/5, **10% of your grade**) and a final paper (Due: 12/17; **60% of your grade**)

Grading Criteria: *In general*, a paper that 1) clearly articulates the claims that are being defended, 2) is well organized, 3) relies on strong evidence and arguments, and 4) is stylistically clear—thereby presenting a competent argument—will receive a ‘B’ grade (a ‘B-’ will be weaker in one of these areas—but still satisfactory—and a ‘B+’ will excel in one of these areas). A ‘C’ grade will be awarded where a paper is weak in one or two of these categories; a ‘D’ grade will be awarded where a paper is weak in 3 or 4 categories or omits one altogether (e.g., by lacking a thesis or lacking arguments for the truth of that thesis). An ‘A’ grade is awarded only where a paper excels in each category, exhibiting a clear capacity for *doing philosophy*.

Paper deadlines: All paper deadlines are firm. Late papers will automatically be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc) for each day that they are late.

Appealing a grade: You can always appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent the work you have done. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your paper is returned, and must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade. A re-evaluation is no guarantee of a better grade, and it can even result in a lower grade if you do not offer a compelling case for raising your grade.

The honor code: The Georgetown University Honor pledge requires you to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with the letter and the spirit of this pledge; and, I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

Tentative Course reading schedule:

Week 1
9/1 Introduction

Part I: The functionalist turn

General Overview: Lycan, "The mind body problem" (*optional*)

Week 2
9/8 Descartes, *Passions of the Soul* (Part I); Correspondence with Hobbes; Letter to Cavendish

Week 3
9/13 Watson, "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views it"
9/15 Ryle, "Descartes Myth"
9/15 Farrell, "Experience" (*optional*)

Week 4
9/20 Lewis, "Mad pain, Martian pain"
9/22 Putnam, "The nature of mental states"
9/22 Lycan, "The continuity of levels of nature" (*optional*)

Week 5
9/27 Block, "Troubles with functionalism"
9/29 Chalmers, "Consciousness and its place in nature"
9/29 Dennett, "Quining qualia" (*optional*)

Part II: The computational theory of mind

General Overview: Horst, "The computational theory of mind" (*optional*)

Week 6
10/4 Turing, "Computing machinery and Intelligence"
10/6 Newell & Simon, "Computer Science as Empirical Inquiry"
10/6 Dennett, "Can machines think?" (*optional*)

Week 7
10/13 Searle, "Minds, Brains, and programs"

Week 8
10/18 Chomsky, "Review of *Verbal Behavior*"
10/20 Fodor, *The language of thought*, Chapter 2; and, "Why there still has to be a language of thought"
10/20 Festinger and Carlsmith, "Cognitive consequences of forced compliance" (*optional*)

Week 9
10/25 Carruthers, "Conscious thinking: Language or Elimination"
10/27 Ramsey et al, "Connectionism, Eliminativism, and the future of folk psychology"

Week 10
11/1 Fodor, "Special sciences"
11/3 Dennett, "Three kinds of intentional psychology"
11/3 Akins, "of sensory systems and the 'aboutness' of mental states" (*optional*)

Week 11
11/8 Selfridge, "Pandemonium: A paradigm for learning"
11/10 Brooks "Intelligence without representation"
11/10 Dreyfus and Dreyfus, "Making a mind vs. modeling the brain"

Part III: Current issues in cognitive science

Week 12
11/15 TBA: Consciousness
11/17

Week 13
11/22 TBA: Memory
11/24

Week 14
11/29 TBA: Memory and the extended mind
12/1

Week 15
12/6 TBA: Moral Psychology
12/8